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AUTHOR Bleuer, Jeanne, Comp.
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ABSTRACT

This digest identifies the issues which must be addressed to make instruments and procedures for assessing school counselor performance efficient, fair, valid, and useful. (BH)

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# IN BRIEF

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**An Information Digest From ERIC/CAPS**
Educational Resources Information Center
Counseling and Personnel Services

# Assessing School Counselor Performance

Spurred by the movement toward competency-based teacher evaluation, school administrators and guidance directors are seeking similar assessment strategies for counselors. This digest identifies the issues which must be addressed to make instruments and procedures efficient, fair, valid and useful.

### Focusing the Assessment

An efficient, but fair assessment of counselor performance focuses primarily on what the counselor actually *does* — not on counselor skills, training or experience, and not on student outcomes. Assessment of prerequisite counselor skills wastes time and effort in that it duplicates other forms of evaluation. Attempting to link student outcomes exclusively to individual counselor performance is unfair in that many factors other than counseling influence student learning and behavior. While accountability for student outcomes is important, it belongs to a broader program evaluation which takes these other factors into account.

### Selecting Assessment Criteria

Counselor assessment criteria must be based on clear role priorities in the current job setting — e.g., developmental/preventive vs. crisis/remedial activities, counseling students vs. consulting with parents or teachers, academic/career vs. personal/social counseling, and counseling vs. administrative/clerical tasks. Once these have been clarified, administrators and counselors should define realistic expectations of time to be spent and tasks to be accomplished. This collaboration could result in guidelines for an assessment instrument, and counselors could also use them for monitoring their own priorities and time.

In most counselor performance assessments, program administrators will want to know not only *what* the counselor does, but *how* (how well) he/she does it. Is information that is given to students accurate? Are school policies observed by the counselor? Are tasks performed efficiently? These types of assessments often require subjective judgments which may be threatening to counselors. Identifying very specific examples of each desired behavior can reduce subjectivity, while obtaining counselor input about the validity of these descriptions can reduce counselor anxiety.

### Designing the Instrument

In performance assessment, the most critical measurement issue is validity. Is specific "job-relatedness" built into the assessment instrument? Does it actually measure what it says it measures? There is no one instrument, either in format or in content, that is universally applicable for assessing school counselor performance. To be valid in a particular setting, the instrument must reflect the priorities of the school, the district, or the state that is conducting the assessment.

Constructing a useful counselor performance assessment instrument does not require extensive measurement expertise. Once the relevant participants in the assessment agree on the job-relatedness of the tasks and behaviors to be assessed, the next step is to make the instrument simple and easy to use. The goal is to produce a tool that will actually be used, not a sophisticated measurement device for collecting research data.

The form may be a simple one-page checklist, in which each item represents one major objective, or a several-page document, in which each objective is broken into specific tasks or characteristic behaviors. Similarly, the response called for on each item may consist of simply a check mark indicating presence of a characteristic or completion of a task, or it may require a numerical rating with each number representing a specific behavior description. Vague, low-to-high options should be avoided.

Even if the form is to be used primarily for assessing minimal competency or "adequate" job performance, it is a good idea to provide item response options that address the full range of evaluation from unsatisfactory to outstanding and/or highly creative performance. This expands the potential usefulness of the assessment process as a positive strategy for facilitating ongoing counselor growth and development.

### Conducting the Assessment

It is important to be open and specific about the purpose of a performance assessment. Counselors should know if it is going to be used to determine promotions or pay increases, to provide constructive feedback for professional development, or simply to meet administrative requirements. They should also know what instrument will be used, who will conduct the assessment, when it will be conducted, and when they will be informed of the results. Conducting the assessment collaboratively, with counselors and assessors responding to and discussing each item, is highly recommended.

### Using Assessment Results

Performance assessment can be time-consuming for both the assessor and the assessee; to be cost-effective, it should serve as many people in as many ways as possible. Viewed positively and constructively, a performance assessment can go well beyond a *pro forma* documentation of minimal competency. It can address new and emerging areas of professional expertise and can serve as a challenge to maximize the ongoing professional development of even the most competent and experienced counselor.

Compiled by Jeanne Bleuer, Acting Associate Director, ERIC/CAPS

*List of resources available upon request.*

**ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse**
2108 School of Education, The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1259 (313) 764-9492



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